

THE
CASE
OF OUR
FELLOW-CREATURES,
THE
Oppressed Africans,
RESPECTFULLY RECOMMENDED TO
THE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION
OF THE
LEGISLATURE
OF
GREAT-BRITAIN,

By the PEOPLE called QUAKERS.

Friends, Society
L O N D O N:

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Street, 1784.

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T H E
C A S E
O F T H E
OPPRESSED AFRICANS.

WE are engaged, under a sense of duty, to bear a publick testimony against a species of oppression which, under the sanction of national authority, has long been exercised upon the natives of Africa, is grown up into a system of tyranny, and is unhappily become a considerable branch of the commerce of this kingdom: an oppression which, in the injustice of its origin, and the inhumanity of its progress, has not, we apprehend, been exceeded, or even equalled, in the most barbarous ages.

We are taught, both by the holy scriptures, and by the experience of ages, to
believe

believe that the Righteous Judge of the whole earth chastiseth nations for their sins, as well as individuals : and can it be expected that he will suffer this great iniquity to go unpunished ? As the design of the institution of government is for a terror to evil doers, and the praise of them that do well, we wish it may be seriously considered, whether this has been made the rule of its administration in this land. Will it not rather be found on inquiry, that, with respect to the enslaved negroes, its benevolent purposes have been perverted ; that its terrors have fallen on the innocent, while evil doers, and oppressors, have been openly encouraged ?

But notwithstanding government, in former times, have been induced by what we conceive to be a mistaken, as well as an unjust, policy, to promote this evil, we are persuaded that many of the present members of the legislature, as true friends of civil and religious liberty,

berty, hold this unrighteous traffick in the utmost abhorrence. This persuasion, joined to the favourable reception of the petition of our last yearly-meeting to the House of Commons, encourages us to address you, thus freely, on this important subject; and we apprehend that the abolition of this iniquitous practice is not only required by the calls of justice and humanity, but is also consistent with sound policy. For avarice in this, as in other instances, has defeated its own purpose. Africa, so populous, and so rich in vegetable and mineral productions, instead of affording all the advantages of a well regulated commerce, is scarcely known but as a mart for slaves, and as the scene of violence and barbarities, perpetrated, in order to procure them, by men professing the Christian religion.

The arguments which have been advanced by the few writers, who have attempted to justify this inhuman business,

ness, can have no weight with generous minds. Those, in particular, which are drawn from the permission to hold slaves amongst the Jews, can in no wise be applied to the practice amongst us : for, blessed be the God and Father of all our mercies, * who hath made of one blood all nations of men, we now live under a dispensation essentially different from that of the law ; in which many things were permitted to the Jews, because of the hardness of their hearts. All distinctions of name and country, so far as they relate to the social duties, are now abolished. We are taught by our blessed Redeemer to look upon all men, even our enemies, as neighbours and brethren, and to do unto them as we would they should do unto us.

Under a dispensation so admirably adapted to promote the temporal as well as the eternal happiness of mankind, that

* Acts xvii. 26.

any should deviate so far from its principles, as to encourage a practice so replete with iniquity, and in particular that this nation, generally characterized by its attachment to civil and religious liberty, should have contributed, perhaps more than any other, to the establishment and continuance of slavery, is a most painful reflection. It would surely have been more consistent with the avowed principles of Englishmen, both as men and as Christians, if their settlement in heathen countries had been succeeded by mild and benevolent attempts to civilize their inhabitants, and to incline them to receive the glad tidings of the gospel. But how different a conduct towards them has been pursued ! it has not only been repugnant, in a political view, to those commercial advantages which a fair and honourable treatment might have procured, but has evidently tended to increase the barbarity of their manners, and to excite in their minds

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an averſion to that religion, the profefſors whereof ſo cruelly treat them.

This traffick is the principal ſource of the deſtructive wars which prevail among theſe unhappy people, and is attended with conſequences, the mere recital of which is ſhocking to humanity. The violent ſeparation of the deareſt relatives, the tears of conjugal and parental affection, the reluctance of the ſlaves to a voyage from which they can have no proſpect of returning, muſt preſent ſcenes of diſtreſs which would pierce the heart of any, in whom the principles of humanity are not wholly effaced. This, however, is but the beginning of ſorrows with the poor captives. Under their cruel treatment on ſhip-board, where, without regard to health or decency, hundreds are confined within the narrow limits of the hold, numbers periſh ; and, by what is called the ſeaſoning in the Iſlands, many are relieved by a premature death, from that ſeries

ries of accumulated sufferings which awaits their less happy survivors. The measure of their afflictions yet remains to be filled ; being sold to the highest bidder, and branded with a hot iron, they have yet to linger on, unpitied, the whole term of their miserable existence, in excessive labour, and too often under the merciless controul of unprincipled and unfeeling men, without proper food or clothing, or any encouragement to sweeten their toil ; whilst every fault, real, or imaginary, is punished with a rigour which is but weakly restrained by the colony laws : instances of the greatest enormity, even the most wanton or deliberate murder of the slaves, being only punished, if punished at all, by trifling pecuniary fines.

But a bare enumeration of the calamities of this wretched people, would exceed the limits proposed to this short address : we think it not improper, however, to give the following extract from
a late

a late author, who was an eye-witness of the miseries of this persecuted race.

‘ If we bring this matter home, and, as Job proposed to his friends, “ put “ our soul in their souls stead ;” if we consider ourselves, and our children, as exposed to the hardships which these people lie under, in supporting an imaginary greatness ;’

‘ Did we, in such case, behold an increase of luxury and superfluity among our oppressors, and therewith feel an increase of the weight of our burdens, and expect our posterity to groan under oppression after us ;’

‘ Under all this misery, had we none to plead our cause, nor any hope of relief from man, how would our cries ascend to the God of the spirits of all flesh, who judgeth the world in righteousness, and, in his own time, is a refuge for the oppressed !’

‘ When

‘ When we were hunger-bitten, and could not have sufficient nourishment, but saw them in fulness, pleasing their taste with things fetched from far ;’

‘ When we were wearied with labour, denied the liberty to rest, and saw them spending their time at ease ; when garments, answerable to our necessities, were denied us, while we saw them clothed in that which was costly and delicate ;’

‘ Under such affliction, how would these painful feelings rise up as witnesses against their pretended devotion ! And if the name of their religion were mentioned in our hearing, how would it sound in our ears, like a word which signified self-exaltation and hardness of heart !’

‘ When a trade is carried on productive of much misery, and they who suffer by it are some thousand
miles

miles off, the danger is the greater of not laying their sufferings to heart.'

' In -procuring slaves from the coast of Africa, many children are stolen privately; wars also are encouraged among the negroes: but all is at a great distance. Many groans arise from dying men, which we hear not. Many cries are uttered by widows and fatherless children, which reach not our ears. Many cheeks are wet with tears, and faces sad with unutterable grief, which we see not. Cruel tyranny is encouraged. The hands of robbers are strengthened; and thousands reduced to the most abject slavery, who never injured us.'

' Were we, for the term of one year only, to be eye-witnesses to what passeth in getting these slaves; were the blood which is there shed, to be sprinkled on our garments; were the poor captives, bound with thongs, heavy laden with elephants

elephants teeth, to pass before our eyes,
in their way to the sea ;'

' Were their bitter lamentations, day
after day, to ring in our ears, and
their mournful cries in the night, to
hinder us from sleeping ;'

' Were we to hear the sound of the
tumult, when the slaves on board the
ships attempt to kill the English, and
behold the issue of those bloody con-
flicts ; what pious man could be a wit-
ness to these things, and see a trade
carried on in this manner, without be-
ing deeply affected with sorrow ?'——

Our religious society in these king-
doms, and in North America, have for
many years tenderly sympathized with
this unhappy people, under their com-
plicated sufferings, and have endeavour-
ed to procure them relief : nor has their
cause been without other advocates ;
whose numbers we have with much sa-
tisfaction

tisfaction observed to increase. The expectation of many, who are anxiously concerned for the suppression of this national evil, is now, under Providence, fixed upon the wise and humane interposition of the legislature; to whom, with dutiful submission, we earnestly recommend the serious consideration of this important subject; with a pleasing hope, that the result will be, a prohibition of this traffick in future, and an extension of such relief to those who already groan in bondage, as justice and mercy may dictate, and their particular situations may admit. That so the blessings of those who are ready to perish may rest upon you, and this nation may no longer, on their account, remain obnoxious to the righteous judgments of the Lord, who, in the most awful manner, declared by his prophets, that the land should tremble, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein, for the iniquity of those who oppress the poor, and crush the needy; and who likewise pronounced

nounced a “ woe ” unto him, that
“ buildeth his house by unrighteous-
“ nefs, and his chambers by wrong;
“ that useth his neighbour’s service
“ without wages, and giveth him not
“ for his work.”

Signed by order of the meeting for
sufferings,* London, the 28th day of
the eleventh month, 1783, by

J O H N A D Y,

Clerk to the meeting.

* Jeremiah xxii. 13.

* This meeting is composed of about one hundred members of the society residing in London, who are chosen by, and correspond with, the meetings in the country. It was instituted, and thus named, during the times of persecution, (anno 1675) in order to receive accounts of the sufferings of our members, and to solicit relief from those in power. It still continues to superintend the general concerns of the society during the intervals of the yearly-meeting.

F I N I S.

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